

**§ 17.331 Complaints.**

(a) Any person, individually or as a member of a class or on behalf of others, may file a complaint with DOI, alleging discrimination prohibited by the Act or these regulations based on an action occurring on or after July 1, 1979. A complaint must be filed within 180 days from the date the complainant had knowledge of the alleged act of discrimination. For good cause shown, however, DOI may extend this time limit.

(b) DOI will consider the date a complaint is filed to be the date upon which the complaint sufficiently meets the criteria for acceptance as described in paragraphs (a) and (c)(1) of this section.

(c) DOI will attempt to facilitate the filing of complaints wherever possible, including taking the following measures:

(1) Accepting as a sufficient complaint, any written statement which identifies the parties involved and the date the complainant first had knowledge of the alleged violation, describes generally the action or practice complained of, and is signed by the complainant.

(2) Freely permitting a complainant to add information to the complaint to meet the requirements of a sufficient complaint, as described in paragraphs (a) and (c)(1) of this section.

(3) Notifying the complainant and the recipient of their rights and obligations under the complaint procedure, including the right to have a representative at all stages of the complaint procedure.

(4) Notifying the complainant and the recipient (or their representatives) of their right to contact DOI for information and assistance regarding the complaint resolution process.

(d) DOI will return to the complainant any complaint outside the jurisdiction of these regulations, and will state the reason(s) why it is outside the jurisdiction of these regulations.

**§ 17.332 Mediation.**

(a) *Referral of complaints for mediation.* DOI will promptly refer to the FMCS all sufficient complaints that:

(1) Fall within the jurisdiction of the Act and these regulations unless the

age distinction complained of is clearly within an exception; and,

(2) Contain all information necessary for further processing.

(b) Both the complainant and the recipient shall participate in the mediation process to the extent necessary to reach an agreement or make an informed judgment that an agreement is not possible.

(c) If the complainant and the recipient reach an agreement, FMCS shall prepare a written statement of the agreement and have the complainant and the recipient sign it. The FMCS shall send the agreement to DOI. DOI, however, retains the right to monitor the recipient's compliance with the agreement.

(d) The FMCS shall protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of the mediation process. No mediator shall testify in any adjudicative proceeding, produce any document, or otherwise disclose any information obtained in the course of the mediation process without prior approval of the head of the mediation agency.

(e) DOI will use the mediation process for a maximum of 60 days after receiving a complaint. Mediation ends if:

(1) 60 days elapse from the time the complaint is filed; or

(2) Prior to the end of that 60 day period, an agreement is reached; or

(3) Prior to the end of that 60 day period, the FMCS determines that an agreement cannot be reached.

(f) The FMCS shall return unresolved complaints to DOI.

**§ 17.333 Investigation.**

(a) *Informal investigation.* (1) DOI will investigate complaints that are unresolved after mediation or are reopened because of a violation of a mediation agreement.

(2) As part of the initial investigation, DOI will use informal fact finding methods, including joint or separate discussions with the complainant and recipient to establish the facts, and, if possible, settle the complaint on terms that are mutually agreeable to the parties. DOI may seek the assistance of any involved State agency.

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(3) DOI will put any agreement in writing and have it signed by the parties and an authorized official at DOI.

(4) The settlement shall not affect the operation of any other enforcement effort of DOI, including compliance reviews and investigation of other complaints which may involve the recipient.

(5) The settlement is not a finding of discrimination against a recipient.

(b) *Formal investigation.* If DOI cannot resolve the complaint through informal means, it will develop formal findings through further investigation of the complaint. If the investigation indicates a violation of these regulations, DOI will attempt to obtain voluntary compliance. If DOI cannot obtain voluntary compliance, it will begin enforcement as described in § 17.335.

#### § 17.334 Prohibition against intimidation or retaliation.

A recipient may not engage in acts of intimidation or retaliation against any person who:

(a) Attempts to assert a right protected by the Act or these regulations; or

(b) Cooperates in any mediation, inquiry, hearing, or other part of DOI's investigation, conciliation, and enforcement process.

#### § 17.335 Compliance procedure.

(a) DOI may enforce the Act and these regulations through:

(1) Termination of a recipient's Federal financial assistance from DOI under the program or activity involved where the recipient has violated the Act or these regulations. The determination of the recipient's violation may be made only after a recipient has had an opportunity for a hearing on the record before an administrative law judge.

(2) Any other means authorized by law including but not limited to:

(i) Referral to the Department of Justice for proceedings to enforce any rights of the United States or obligations of the recipient created by the Act or these regulations.

(ii) Use of any requirement of, or referral to, any Federal, State or local government agency that will have the

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effect of correcting a violation of the Act or these regulations.

(b) DOI will limit any termination under § 17.335(a)(1) to the particular recipient and particular program or activity or part of such program or activity DOI finds in violation of these regulations. DOI will not base any part of a termination on a finding with respect to any program or activity of the recipient that does not receive Federal financial assistance from DOI.

(c) DOI will take no action under paragraph (a) of this section until:

(1) The Secretary or his/her designee has advised the recipient of its failure to comply with the Act and these regulations and has determined that voluntary compliance cannot be obtained.

(2) Thirty days have elapsed after the Secretary or his/her designee has sent a written report of the circumstances and grounds of the action to the committees of Congress having legislative jurisdiction over the program or activity involved. The Secretary or his/her designee will file a report whenever any action is taken under paragraph (a) of this section.

(d) DOI also may defer granting new Federal financial assistance from DOI to a recipient when a hearing under § 17.335(a)(1) is initiated.

(1) New Federal financial assistance from DOI includes all assistance for which DOI requires an application or approval, including renewal or continuation of existing activities or authorization of new activities, during the deferral period. New Federal financial assistance from DOI does not include increases in funding as a result of changed computation of formula awards or assistance approved prior to the beginning of a hearing under § 17.335(a)(1).

(2) DOI will not begin a deferral until the recipient has received a notice of an opportunity for a hearing under § 17.335(a)(1). DOI will not continue a deferral for more than 60 days unless a hearing has begun within that time or the time for beginning the hearing has been extended by mutual consent of the recipient and the Secretary. DOI will not continue a deferral for more than 30 days after the close of the hearing, unless the hearing results in a finding against the recipient.